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ABSTRACT

A theoretical linguistic model is insufficient to deal with the problems of language teaching because of the complexity of the phenomena concerned and the dynamic nature of language acquisition and communication. Most linguistic models neglect the fact that, in communicative situations, language users construct the prerequisites of communicative success. Variations in the natural situations of language use make analysis of the language teaching process difficult, and most language teaching materials are too simplistic. A communicative rather than a linguistic approach would put more emphasis on reception and message processing. A more accurate model of the processes and parameters in language acquisition would incorporate the factors of acculturation and motivation, language contact, input, the socio-affective filter, intake, prior knowledge, interference, and personality. A two-page bibliography concludes the document. (MSE)

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In language teaching there has been a certain trend away from the teaching of grammar in the last few years. Instead of grammatical competence, the importance of communicative competence is being emphasized. The idea that the study of the linguistic code only is insufficient for the interpretation of communicative success is becoming more widespread. Although a certain change in the general attitude toward the question of what language is and how language should be described is apparent, very little information is available today of how language skills proper, ie. the control of the verbal code, and various information processing systems should be correlated with regard to an overall picture of language proficiency.

The practice of foreign language teaching has mostly reflected changes in linguistic theory (cf. eg. Nawrocka-Fisiak 1977). Audiolingual methodology received its strongest cues from structuralism through behavioural psychology, and cognitive aspects of language teaching came to be emphasized with the upsurge of generativist ideologies. A grave defect in all such methodologies is the basic assumption that problems of language teaching, which are typically problems of applied research, can be solved by means of a formal theoretical model or a single scientific theory without paying due attention to the complex nature of the problems concerned. Moreover, it is self-evident that problems which are non-grammatical by nature cannot be solved by means of grammatical theories.

There is also another reason why a theoretical linguistic model cannot be sufficient for the solution of the problems of language teaching. The linguist's description of a language is static and represents the product of language acquisition, while language teaching should be built upon a dynamic representation of the processes of language learning and language acquisition (cf. Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1979). In addition to the dynamic nature of language acquisition, language use also entails dynamic aspects of human interaction and communication which should be integrated into the description of the phenomena involved in second/foreign language proficiency. Most linguistic models neglect the fact that in communicative situations language users themselves construct the prerequisites of communicative success. It is a kind of game whose basic rules are known to the

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participants through, among other things, the process of socialization, while the strategy and tactics and their implementation are chosen in the communicative situation. Individual variations in natural situations of language use pose great difficulties for an analysis of the language teaching process; the simplistic picture given by most language teaching materials, which is mostly created by linguistic models, is definitely false.

It is a sad state of affairs that languages have been learned through the ages more often without teaching than by teaching. Nothing is more normal for human beings than acquiring languages. If the formal aspects of the language code are the sole object of language teaching, aspects which are not even observed by language users in normal communication, it is only natural that language learners intuitively object to an artificial tampering with what they feel to be an integral part of themselves. Most of the information upon which language teaching has been built has been anecdotal, while the amount of research data has been negligible. Several variables both within and outside the learner affect the product of the second language acquisition process; if it is assumed that everybody, at any age, has the ability to internalize languages (see Krashen 1978), what is needed is knowledge about why the process does not always succeed. The major research tasks centre on two primary areas (see also Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1979):
(1) research on cross-language interaction to deal with problems that are related to the communicative interactional situation, and to discover answers to the question of how language learners develop the ability to produce the right kind of cues, both linguistic and non-linguistic, and the ability to interpret similar cues correctly; and
(2) research on the problems related to the level of message processing in the language learner, which involves a primarily psycholinguistic approach to deal with the phenomena beyond the horizon of consciousness.

Earlier, language proficiency was mostly understood to mean knowledge of the details of the verbal code; today a generally accepted framework is lacking, within which statements could be made of what it means when it is said that someone knows or does not know a language. The fact that a learner is able to recognize and segment phenomena and elements that relate to a system abstracted from sentences/utterances by a linguist does not necessarily mean that he is able to make use of the same phenomena and elements in natural speech communication. Similarly, 'communicative' teaching of foreign languages mostly aims at the production of grammatically well-formed sentences without much attention actually being paid to what is being communicated. That is to say, a 'communicative' method is

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used to teach grammar 'communicatively', not to teach communication.

Structural linguistics was an approach designed to solve the complexity of problems involved in the description of language by means of an atomistic, or an elementaristic, method: the entity was split into more controllable subsystems; simultaneously the variation evident in real language communication was swept away by choosing a high enough level of resolution, a suitable level of -emes. A confusion resulted from the fact that structures and items which were found to be fundamental in structuralist analysis were also regarded as basic elements in language teaching. In the teaching of pronunciation, for instance, this meant that phonetic differences were classed as phonological and allophonic; phonological errors were regarded as dangerous, while allophonic errors were not considered important because they were not seen to affect the meaning of the utterance (see Lehtonen and Sajavaara (eds.) 1979). The assumption that the constructs of linguistic description, such as phonemes, morphemes, and junctures, were also relevant units in the production and perception of messages - or in the process of language acquisition - was quite ad hoc. As a matter of fact, today it is not at all self-evident that these parameters are connected with the processing of information in communicative tasks. Most work on language teaching analysis which is derived from the isolation of autonomous levels of description gives the impression that learners have the ability to create concrete representations on the basis of abstractions that are taught to them. In language acquisition, the true state of affairs is exactly the reverse: the language acquirer builds up his language system on the basis of the concrete representations to which he is exposed. The system therefore works from the concrete to the abstract, and not from the abstract to the concrete.

The choice of the reference model concerns the model to be used in the description, and the choice between a static and dynamic view of language. The latter relates to the choice between a linguistic and psycholinguistic description, or between a structural and operational modelling of the communicative vehicle, ie. language and the chain of speech (cf. Lehtonen 1978; see also Davis 1978, and Levelt and Flores d'Arcais 1977:xiv). The former (the structural model) aims at describing the abstracted and idealized strucutre of language, which, for present purposes, means similarities and differences in the structures, or grammars, of two or more languages. An essential presupposition for an understanding of the dynamic view of language is the insight that grammatical rules, syntactic as well as phonological, are regarded only as descriptions of certain regular structures of language

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and not as models for the mental processes actually used by people in speaking and listening (cf. Clark and Clark 1977:190ff.).

The target of an operational model of language is language in action. In perception, linguistic information is not processed 'hierarchically' by proceeding step by step through the levels of grammar from a concrete level of representation to phonology and syntax, and further to abstract 'meaning'. Instead, the components of the system which exploit the hearer's phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic knowledge work simultaneously in terms of a time-sharing system. This model implies that there are 'cues' for all levels of grammar in the flow of speech waves and that the information involved is not present in the actual speech coded through phonology alone. Corresponding factors are also present in the process of message production, which, similarly, cannot be seen as a chain of steps leading from higher linguistic levels through syntax and phonology to phonetics and actual physical speech. In perception, lexicon, syntax, and phonological structure all act as a set of constraints which reduce the number of probable 'guesses' in the process of a linguistic identification of the acoustic speech input. The knowledge-driven process is simultaneous with the input-driven analysis (see Lindsay and Norman 1977:278ff.). In addition, there is a retroactive reworking effect, where the perception of a word or a sequence of words may be changed afterwards on the basis of the subsequent context. These are all processes which are not normally accessible to consciousness. Only the single final option is perceived, and not the preceding multiplicity of choices.

Human communication is dependent on a variety of factors (see Figure 1). In addition to grammar and lexicon such factors as discourse history, facts and beliefs, social constraints, and information about language-world relationships can be listed, which feed information to the Overlord; in addition, a number of personality factors are found, which include will and intention, affective and emotive variables, and performance potential. All these may function differently in different kinds of external situations. The final performance is a kind of compromise between the demands of the task and available capacity.

Language teaching has been traditionally built upon an idea of the primacy of production. There are several reasons, however, why more attention should be paid to reception. Why is it important for aspects of the process of understanding speech and text to be considered when language acquisition and learning are being dealt with? There are at least two reasons:

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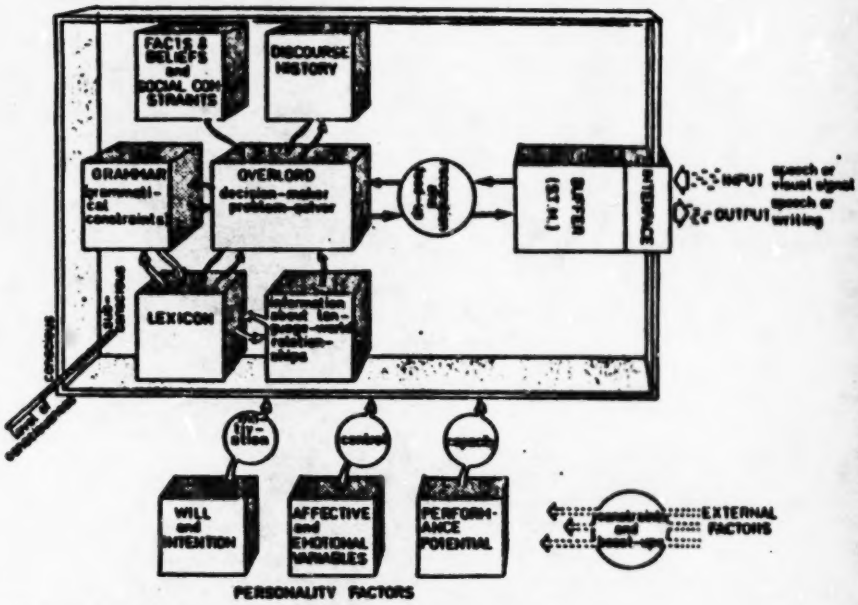

Figure 1. A simplified model of message processing.

(1) Language teaching aims at a correct use of the 'machinery' described in the model of message processing (see Figure 1).
(2) This process of speech reception is the channel through which linguistic information reaches the learner in a language-teaching situation; if it does not function, there can be no intake.

It may now be asked whether a linguistic description of a grammar of a foreign language is the right kind of description for the selection and arrangement of methods and materials for the teaching of language proficiency. It is important to bear in mind that grammar is a theoretical model which describes the set of possible sentences in a language, ie. a description of what people know about the sentences. A grammatical model gives no clue as to how people apply this knowledge when they are processing a sentence (when planning a sentence or when understanding a sentence they hear). What is needed is a model which describes language in action, ie. the phenomena and processes whose meaningful use is the target of language teaching. From recent work by Flores d'Arcais (1978), Carroll & al. (1978)

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and Marslen-Wilson & al. (1978) it is evident that less emphasis should be placed on linguistic variables and more "on the role of surface perceptual cues used by the perceiver to construct 'functional propositional units'" (Marslen-Wilson & al. 1978:244). According to Carroll and Bever (1976), our current focus in the studies of sentence perception must be on structures only insofar as they reveal properties of the psychological operation themselves. A distinction can be made along these lines between a linguistically oriented and a communicatively oriented approach to the process of perception:

(1) A linguistically oriented approach aims at explaining how a linguistic representation is derived from speech input.

(2) A communicatively oriented approach describes how the hearer deciphers the speaker's intentions in particular communicative settings.

A communicative approach implies a reorientation towards grammar. When reference is made to grammar, no grammatical model is meant but, rather, the characteristics of the communicative mechanism which make it possible for a native speaker to produce a text/utterance which is 'grammatically acceptable' and which make it possible for a native speaker to interpret the information embedded in a text in a predictable way. Although it is assumed that grammar and grammatical rules are not necessarily neurobehavioural structures, it must also be assumed that grammar and grammatical rules are, in some way, represented in neurobehavioural structures (cf. Buckingham and Hollien 1978:294).

Communicative competence could now be defined as an ability to make use of the mechanism described in Figure 1 in an acceptable way. Such competence can be reached through communication only, while formal teaching leads to knowledge about grammatical constraints in the form of generalized rules, and to what could be termed 'pseudo-competence'. It is sufficient for the simulation of acceptable language behaviour in certain situations only. Language proficiency should not be confused with what is called linguistic competence; the latter is a set of logical operations which can be used for the projection of grammatical knowledge in a higher-level cognitive analysis; thus it is not part of language proficiency but a cognitive ability above it.

One of the most interesting and problematic sections of the model is the interrelationship between the 'lexicon' and 'grammar'. Marslen-Wilson and Welsh (1978:58) suggest that each lexical memory item (or 'word') could be defined as an intersection of a cluster of procedures operating over a range of cognitive dimensions (cf. Norton 1979 and Ellis 1979). An appro-

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priate access code activates the entire range of processing procedures. In this way, a 'word' activates certain frequent and prefabricated phrases, word combinations, certain grammatical constraints, selectional restrictions, certain semantic concepts and fields, etc. (cf. Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976). This may lead to a reversal of the relative importance of what is called grammar and lexicon. From the processing point of view, 'words' are, perhaps, primary, and the language 'machine' is not after all entirely dissimilar to what is called a finite state grammar by Chomsky in Syntactic Structures (1957) simply viewed from a different angle. It must be remembered that the term 'word' is used here as a label for something which is much more than a 'word': it means a lexical item which includes all the information concerning its use in sentences and its relationships to other words. Metalinguistic knowledge is seriously handicapped by formal teaching, and it may be that entire language proficiency is in fact embedded in the memory in the form of such lexical items. The individual is unable to perceive consciously the processes involved; what he perceives are the final choices and not the processes that result in the ultimate perception.

There is some evidence of the fact that successful language acquirers (in natural settings) are more concerned with communication than with form (see, eg., Fillmore 1976), and caretakers pay attention to children's messages and not to their grammar (see Snow and Ferguson (eds.) 1977, Waterson and Snow (eds.) 1978). Since learning the L2 means an expansion of communicative potential to the area of another code, the learner's role requires more attention. Recent literature on second language acquisition (see Hatch 1977, Hakuta and Cancino 1977) is mainly concerned with learners acquiring language in natural settings, and there is very little new data about foreign languages in formal classroom settings. In some recent work on how people acquire second languages, a distinction has been made between conscious language learning (the memorizing of rules) and unconscious acquisition, which results from exposure to the target language, in a similar way to first language acquisition (see Krashen 1978, Bialystok 1978, d'Anglejan 1978). There seem to be two extremes: at one end we have total acquisition which results in native-like performance without any L1 influence, and, at the other end, a language system is found which is based entirely on the explicit memorizing of rules, sufficient for the production of acceptable L2 strings under favourable circumstances (cf. Sajavaara 1978). Adults may acquire a great deal of information about the language they are studying but they may also acquire an ability to use that language

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for communication in a way that resembles the acquisition of the first language. Acquisition is possible without conscious learning and learning does not necessarily lead to acquisition. In formal teaching and learning situations, an important part may be played by material which is acquired by learners without it being overtly taught, or in spite of teaching. Overtly formulated grammatical rules may be necessary for acceptable communication in the classroom but practices of this kind are not easily transferable outside the classroom (Lamendella 1979). In this way, learners may internalize an immense body of information about the language but they lack the ability to make use of this information in natural settings. Krashen (eg. 1978) explains this as a function of his Monitor (see also Davies in this volume) but, in a more general frame of reference, it results from the interplay of the conscious and subconscious strata of the information-processing mechanism described as the third dimension in Figure 1.

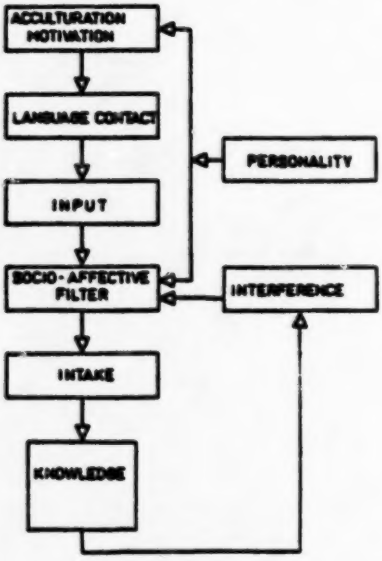

Figure 2. A model of language learning and acquisition processes

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Figure 2 is a simplified model of certain processes and parameters in language acquisition. Language contact - a teacher's model is not always sufficient - is necessary for input, and intake is regulated by the socio-affective filter, which for its part is controlled by various social and personality factors, on the one hand, and the existing knowledge about the language and languages and the world, on the other. The filter can be opened by integrating the learner both psychologically and socially into the target group as much as possible. The importance of the mother tongue may be greater here than has been assumed, because if it is assumed that competence is a superior skill lying beyond the level of proficiency, a great deal of what is important in communication can obviously be transferred from this competence which has been acquired in connection with the acquisition of the mother tongue. It is particularly important to remember that both the conscious and subconscious perception of what makes part of the world including language is governed by previous experiences. What is taken in is processed through a device where existing knowledge is a kind of yardstick.

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